



AN ARTISTIC ANALYSIS OF QĀJĀR MARRIAGE
CONTRACTS

BY

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the degree of Master of Arts in Islamic and Other
Civilizations

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ABSTRACT

This research has investigated the decoration of one hundred marriage certificates of the Qājār period. The major aspects of this study were related to the study of layouts, motifs and designs, color, calligraphy and symbolism embedded in motifs and colors. Systematic library search in order to investigate the social and historical pretexts of wording and artwork of the studied documents has been undertaken. Among various visited sites was the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia that owns five marriage certificates of the Qājār era. The applied artistic research of this work, regarding the scrutinizing the decorative artworks, included the preparation of line drawings for layouts, motifs and actual color palettes. One of the important goals in this research was to identify any possible exclusively used layout, motif, or color in any of the studied documents. Exploring any correlation between the style of illumination and artwork of these documents and their original owner's social class was another goal of this research. Were there any symbolic concepts behind the motifs and colors? Some of the important results of this study can be summarized as follows: Layouts of the studied marriage contracts, obeyed the traditional arrangement of the art of the book, except for 5 of them that belonged to converted Jewish families. Among the floral motifs, rosettes and arabesques were used more, while in geometric motifs, cartouche was the common one. Among the architectural motifs, the dome-shape motif was predominant. Birds depicted in different styles were among the animal motifs, except for one case that belonged to the royal family in which the motif of lions on the two sides of a crown was used. Among the colours, gold, cinnabar and lapis lazuli were the most frequently used ones. Gold was the main colour in the marriage contracts that belonged to the royal families.

ملخص البحث

قام هذا البحث بدراسة الزخرفة في مائة وثيقة زواج تعود إلى عهد قاجار. هذا ومن ضمن المواضيع الرئيسة التي يحتويها هذا البحث هي: دراسة النماذج والزخارف والتصاميم بالإضافة إلى دراسة الألوان وفن الخط وكذا كشف الصور الرمزية الكامنة في كل من الزخارف والألوان الآنف ذكرها. وقد قام البحث بإجراء دراسة منهجية تهدف إلى سير الوقائع الاجتماعية والتاريخية التي تم من خلالها صياغة وتحت الأعمال الفنية الموجودة في وثائق تمت دراستها سابقاً. فمن بين المواقع المختلفة التي قُمنّا بزيارتها مُتحفُ الفنون الإسلامية في ماليزيا. ويحتوي المتحف المذكور على خمس وثائق زواج تعود إلى عصر قاجار. وتتضمن البحوث الفنية التطبيقية لهذا العمل، أي المتمثل في دراسة الأعمال الفنية المتعلقة بالزخرفة، إعداد رسومات خطية للنماذج والزخارف ولوحات الألوان الفعلية. ومن الأهداف الرئيسة لهذا البحث كشف النقاب عن أيّ استخدام محتمل للتصاميم والزخارف وكذا الألوان الموجودة في الوثائق المدروسة سابقاً. ويهدف البحث أيضاً إلى استكشاف ارتباط بين نوع الإضاءة والأعمال الفنية لهذه الوثائق من جهة والطبقة الاجتماعية التي كان يتمتع بها أصحابها الأصليون من جهة أخرى. وبعبارة أخرى هل كانت لهذه الزخارف والألوان مفاهيم رمزية كامنة؟ ويمكن تلخيص بعض النتائج الهامة لهذه الدراسة على النحو التالي: باستثناء خمسة منها تنتمي إلى أسرة يهودية فإنّ نماذج عقود الزيجات المدروسة سابقاً تتناسب مع الترتيب التقليدي لفن الكتاب. وقد تم استخدام الحلى الوردية والأرابيسك في الزخارف النباتية، والخرطوش في الزخارف الهندسية. وكان العنصر الغالب في الزخارف المعمارية استخدام الزخارف المصمّمة على شكل القبة. أمّا الزخارف المتعلقة بالحيوانات فكان الغالب فيها رسومات طيورٍ على أنماط مختلفة باستثناء حالة واحدة حيثُ كان يستخدم فيها أفراد الأسرة المالكة زخارف من أسود على طرفي التيجان التي كانوا يرتدونها. وأمّا الألوان فكان الأكثر شيوعاً منها هي اللون الذهبي والزنجفر واللازورد. هذا وإنّ اللون الذهبي كان يُعدّ الأكثر استعمالاً في أوساط أفراد الأسرة المالكة أثناء عقود الزفاف.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and Other Civilizations).

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Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and Other Civilizations).

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.....
Mahmood Zuhdi Abdul Majid
Dean, International Institute
of Islamic Thought and
Civilization

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Leila Alhagh

Signature Date

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD.	<i>Anno Domini</i>
AH.	<i>(Anno Hegirae)</i> : After Hijrah.
BC.	Before Christ
BCE.	Before the Common Era equivalent to BC.
d.	died
e.g	<i>(exempligratia)</i> : For example
etc.	<i>(et cetera)</i> : And so forth
IAMM	Islamic Art Museum Malaysia
ISTAC	International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization
Lit.	Literal(ly)
No.	Number
Reg.	Regular
saw	Arabic words “ <i>Ṣallallāh-u ‘Alayhi Wa Sallam</i> ” (may God's blessings and peace be on him)
swt	Arabic words “ <i>Subhānahū Wa Ta‘ālā</i> ”(Glory to Him, the Exalted)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic term for marriage, as stated in the Qur'an, is "*nikāh*".¹ According to the Qur'an, *nikāh* is a sacred act, a blessing bestowed upon human beings to bring them peace and rest² and to cause love and mercy³ between a man and a woman.

The command in Islam for documentation of agreements has led to the formation of legal marriage contracts. The financial aspect of these documents (specifically on the section related to the bride's dowry) and the seals and signatures of the witnesses (*shuhūd*) have given an additional legal edge to these documents of love. Since marriage is a legal institution, it is normal to expect marriage certificates to be documented. These documents have special aspects which render them valuable transcripts.

Marriage contracts belong to the class of Islamic legal deeds or certificates such as *qabālah* (deed of purchase), *wikālat-nāmah* (power of attorney), or *waqf-nāmah* (deed of endowment) and, on a more general level, relate to *farmāns* and official letters (*dast-khaṭṭ*). However, the wide variety of scripts and different coloured inks, as well as a varied number of painted, gilded and, later, stencilled designs distinguish them from their plainer legal counterparts. Most extant marriage contracts date from the last two centuries with a few examples from the 18th century.

Marriage certificates are of richest documents that are worthy of analysis for they can be studied from wide and various aspects. Research on these documents can be done from a social, legal, historical, religious, literary or artistic view.

¹ First Encyclopedia of Islam, New edition, "Nikah".

² Surah Al-A'raf, 7:189

³ Surah Al-Rum, 30:21

The literary language used in these documents show the proficiency of the writers in Persian and Arabic literature. In these documents one can find the amount of the bride's dowry, different currencies, titles of honor and so much social, economic and historical evidence that can become sources for further studies in these areas. These documents can also be studied from the artistic aspect as well. The artistic aspect distinguishes marriage contracts from their legal counterparts. One can also study the changes that occurred in the styles of Persian and Arabic calligraphy and illumination through these documents. Research can be done on the materials used in their illumination, different motifs and layouts.

The origin of Iranian marriage contracts goes as far as the pre-Islamic era and can be traced back to the epoch of Zoroastrians, who documented their marriages. Islamic encouragements for documenting marriages and the sacredness of this act have rendered these scripts in various designs throughout history.

This research intends to study the artistic aspects of some 100 marriage contracts selected from the Qājār period (1785-1925 AD). These documents are preserved in various museums and collections as they contain a special feature that cannot be seen in other legal documents. The general appearance of such contracts usually conforms with the style of the illumination used for page decoration in the traditional art of the book. The same style of decoration can be seen in the illumination of the holy Quran in the same period.

A separate study of the layout, motifs, colours, calligraphy and text seems to be necessary to study the artistic aspects of these documents. In the area of Islamic art, motifs, patterns and colours have always carried symbolic meanings.. Unveiling the symbolic roots of the decoration of these documents is another aim of this study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

One of the chapters of this study was allocated to the detailed study of five marriage contracts that belonged to the IAMM, as a case study for the research. Unfortunately, the museum did not provide the required pictures of marriage contracts and the researcher had to eliminate this part of the study.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC AND PERSIAN WORDS

In this research the transliteration rules of IIUM both for Arabic and Persian entries, which is presented in the following table, have been followed.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE															
CONSONANTS															
Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu															
Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	'	'	'	ز	z	z	z	گ	-	g	g	گ	-	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	-	-	ř	ل	l	l	l	ل	l	l	l
پ	-	p	p	ٹ	-	zh	j	م	m	m	m	م	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	ن	n	n	n
ث	-	-	-	ش	sh	sh	ş	د	h	h	h'	د	h	h'	h'
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v	و	w	v/u	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	đ	ž	ž	ی	y	y	y	ی	y	y	y
چ	-	ch	ç	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	-	-	ة	-ah	-	-a ²
ح	h	h	h	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	-	-	ال	al ³	-	-
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	-	-	-								
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğ								
ڈ	-	-	-	ف	f	f	f								
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q								
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ								

VOWELS				
		Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	Ā	-
	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form i)	iy (final form i)	iy (final form i)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uv	uvv
	و	uvv (for Persian)		
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ي	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a	a or e
	و	u	u	u or ū
	ي	i	i	o or ō
	ي	i	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ گھ

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

Persian proper names such as the names of museums and contemporary Iranian scholars are mentioned in the form that appeared in their articles and books. The names of Iranian kings, dynasties, cities and past scholars have been transliterated according to the IIUM transliteration table.

All the Quranic verses and names of Arabic characters have been transliterated according to their Arabic standard.

NOTES ON THE NAMES OF THE FIGURES OF THE MARRIAGE CONTRACTS

All the studied marriage contracts were extracted from the book of *The Sacred Art of Marriage* or the Online Harvard Collection. Their equivalent names used in this research are mentioned in the appendices at the end of this research in order to facilitate finding the images of the studied marriage contracts in the book of *The Sacred Art of Marriage* or in the Harvard Collection.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Studying the illumination, motifs, colours and layouts that appeared in marriage contracts of the Qājār period is necessary to study the artistic aspect of these documents. The decorative portions of these contracts are filled with a variety of scripts, sun figures, bird motifs, cypress trees and paisley leaves, and investigating the motifs and symbolism will lead us to the meaning behind these special symbols and motifs.

It is important to note that marriage certificates are produced for different social and economic classes of the society, and this issue apparently affected the style and lavishness of the illumination of the contracts. A comparative study of the

illumination of the contracts from different socio-economic classes of the society is another important aim of this research.

Special colours have been used in decorating marriage certificates. Finding these colours, studying them and finding out why those colours have been used are among the goals of this study.

The use of gold and lapis lazuli, which are precious materials, is evident in these documents. The amount of the use of precious materials for colouring also reveals the social level of the involved families, and this issue is also analyzed in this study.

A brief introduction to the most general colours used in illumination, their ingredients and ways of preparation is also necessary in order to study the colours used in the illumination of marriage certificates. Therefore, colour symbolism will be another part of this section.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions are the main concerns of this study:

- What are the common layouts, motifs and colours of the illumination of the studied marriage contracts?
- Are there some special motifs used exclusively in the illumination of these documents and if yes, what are they and why?
- What is the symbolic significance of different motifs and colours especially related to the context of the nature of these documents?
- Is there a preferable place for colours or specific motifs in the body of these contracts?

- Are there notable differences between the decorations of the documents prepared for different social classes of the society?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Marriage contracts can be studied from historical, legal, religious, social and artistic aspects. In this research we do not focus on the legal, social, religious and historical aspects, and we will conduct only a preliminary study in these areas. This study will mainly focus on the artistic aspects of these valuable documents and the relationship between the form and the content, as there is no research, to the researcher's knowledge, which has made a full investigation of the matter.

This research studies the images of 73 marriage contracts from the Iranian National Archives and the private collections presented in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia in 2000. The images were extracted from the book *The Sacred Art of Marriage*, written by Amir H. Zekrgoo. Images of the other 27 marriage contracts, which are extracted from online Harvard University collection named "Women's Worlds in Qājār Iran", were also studied. The collection can be accessed at <http://www.qajarwomen.org/>.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To distinguish each and every motif used in the illumination of the marriage contracts.
- To extract and clarify different colours of illumination and their way of placement.
- To investigate the use of floral, geometric, architectural and animal motifs and their symbolic significance.

- To establish the form-content relation
- To study and categorize different type of layouts both in scroll and booklet type contracts.
- To categorize marriage contracts according to their similarities in form, layout, colour and illumination.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Library research: For historical and social background, text and contents.

Field Work: Visiting museums, archives, and private collections in Iran to identify the sources relevant to the study.

Applied Artistic Research:

- Preparation of line drawings of various layouts (using AutoCad and Photoshop softwares)
- Preparation of line drawings of motifs (using AutoCad and Photoshop softwares)
- Preparation of a colour palette (using actual paint)

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first research on marriage certificates titled “An Investigation on Marriage Certificates” was done by Hossein Tayebati. This research was done on 100 “*Mihr Nāmah*” (marriage certificates) collected from all over Iran in 1974. In this research, the author investigated the social, ethical, economical and legal aspects of marriage from the contents of these contracts. This paper was published in the journal *Hunar wa Mardum*.

The first exhibition on marriage certificates in the world was held in 1976 by the Negarestan Museum in Iran. A coloured catalogue called *Iranian Wedding Contracts of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* with images of 66 marriage certificates and with the descriptions of the document key data was published. The catalogue contained two introductions from Layla Soudavar Diba and Jamshid Bahnam, which mainly focused on the social and legal information that can be extracted from these documents and how these documents are a precious source of study in these areas.

Some other studies were done later, and most of them tried to introduce a single marriage certificate and give a general elaboration of the content.

Mahmoud Ahmadi published his paper “A Marriage Contract from Qājār Period” in the *Barrisī-hā-yi Tārīkhī* journal in 1977. In his article, Ahmadi gave a brief introduction on the calligraphy of the contract and provided some images of it and mentioned the content.

In 1977, “Marriage Contracts”, a paper by Aydin Aghdashlu was published in the catalogue of *Iranian Wedding Contracts of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. This paper investigated the artistic forms of the 66 marriage contracts which were exhibited in the Negarestan Museum in 1976. He also compared the illumination and calligraphy of those marriage contracts in general. In this paper, the author mentioned different symbolisms used in the illumination and provided an introductory description of how they are different from the symbols used in the other forms of art in the same period.

The Sacred Art of Marriage, an exhibition held in 2000 in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM), displayed a range of marriage certificates from the Qājār period that belonged to Iran National Archived Organization. Amir H. Zekrgoo

published a book entitled *The Sacred Art of Marriage*, which comprised a detailed description of the key data in the contracts and categorized the information on the literature, and the form and seals both on scroll and booklet types of marriage contracts. This research can be considered as the first of its kind in this area and became an inspiration for further research. The book also drew researchers' attention back to this area of research, giving them a very specialized view on how they can approach the field.

From that time on, some research papers have been presented on the subject. Most of these studies argue general points on the importance of these documents in social and art history.

Another paper, entitled "The Persian Tradition of Marriage Documentation: Pre-Islamic & Islamic marriage Contracts" was published by Amir H. Zekrgoo in 2007 in *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*. In this paper, the author focused on his research in literature and the forms of the marriage contracts he had studied earlier.

The book *The Manifestation of the Iranian Art in the National Archives* was published in 2002, in Tehran. In this research, Seyyed Hasan Shahrestani, investigates different historical documents in the National Archives from the aspects of calligraphy, seals, signatures, decoration, illumination, design and painting. He also studied the methodology concisely. In this research, the author studied 15 marriage certificates from the National Archives Collection.

The paper "Marriage and How It Was Reflected in Marriage Contracts" was published by Kyianoosh Kiyani in the journal *Farhang-i Mardum* in 2001. Kiyani investigated marriage and divorce in Iran before and after Islam, and also the structure of the contents of the contracts.